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WHOSE LEADERSHIP IN RELIGION SHALL WE ACCEPT?*

BY ALFRED W. MARTIN.

The preceding discourse dealt with the problem, whom shall we follow on the social question? We saw that while each of the great historic leaders from Plato to Tolstoi offers a panacea for social evils, yet the truth remains that there is and can be no one cure-all for the evils of society. The most that any particular reform measure can accomplish is to improve slightly the social conditions and so to educate the public mind that a change in the ideal of life will be gradually effected, thereby insuring genuine social progress.

Another conclusion to which we were brought is that all the great social leaders of the past and present look forward to a *statically* perfect state as the social ideal to be realized. But we know that life is essentially dynamic and progressive. Eliminate these factors and retrogression deathward is inevitable.

"There is no standing still! Even as I pause,
The steep path shifts and I slip back apace.
Movement was safety; by the journey-laws
No help is given, no safe abiding-place,
No idling in the pathway hard and slow;
I must go forward or must backward go."

Inasmuch then as all the historic social leaders are alike limited by either erroneous or partial conceptions of life's ideal and of the conditions of progress, it follows that we cannot accept the leadership of any one of them. We cannot go wholly with Plato or More, Bellamy or George, Morris or Tolstoi. To no scheme can we give our unqualified assent, though gratefully recognizing the contributions of each reformer to the solution of the complex social problem.

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*A discourse delivered Sunday, April 26th, at Tacoma and Seattle, written after delivery.

Now when we turn to the religious realm and ask whom shall we follow here, we reach conclusions analogous to those on the social question.

Whom shall we follow in religion, in the effort to perfect ourselves in all our relations? Who can serve as our leader in the daily march of the moral and religious life? Of all the great figures that loom up in the moral and religious history of the past, is there any one whose leadership we can accept in preference to that of all others? Is there any one so endowed as to be the ideal of humanity, a pattern fit for universal adoption; one who contains in himself the totality of all the graces and powers essential to the ideal life?

I.

Is such an one Confucius? No reader of the life and work of the great Chinese sage can fail to be deeply impressed by the superb example which he gave to China and the world of moral earnestness, self-possession, imperturbable allegiance to the highest interests of the state, steady devotion to those practical virtues which make "the superior man" of the "Analects"—justice, temperance, intellectual honesty, commercial integrity, reverence for ancestral exemplars in the conduct of life.

But the very brilliancy with which *these* noble traits shone out in the character of Confucius inevitably eclipsed the correlative virtues. Thus, for example, we find in him none of that high-souled and contagious hopefulness and enthusiasm which were dominant in the personality of Jesus. Believing as he did that the kingdom of heaven was soon to be established on the earth by the miraculous interposition of his God, Jesus kindled in the hearts of his hearers a mighty hope and enthusiasm, the significance of which can never pass out of human thought, though the theory of Jesus has been long since outgrown. That forward look to a higher order of society in which the meek, the poor, the oppressed, the persecuted, would inherit the earth, coupled with the enthusiasm and cheer it generated, is what we miss in Confucius. For him the golden age of humanity was in the past. He delighted to dwell on the happy states and glorious reigns of great kings long ago. In common with his fellow countrymen, Con-

fucius showed the backward-looking tendency and made it part of his religion. A most excellent and praiseworthy habit this of reverence for the past. Most important it is for every nation to know and to appreciate its past, but when that past is allowed to dominate the present, the mainspring of progress is broken. 'Tis from the thought of the future that we derive inspiration and hope. Centuries ago China attained an exceptionally high degree of civilization, and then retrogression set in because "there is no standing still." If for no other reason then, the lack of this forward-looking impulse, the want of enthusiasm that ennobles and cheers and that constitutes so essential a part of the ideal of character, these deficiencies make it impossible for us to see in Confucius one whose leadership can satisfy.

II.

What of the Buddha? There are those in this country (not to speak of the millions in the Orient born Buddhists) who, having abandoned the dogmas of Christianity, hold that Gotama Buddha is the leader to follow, the ideal man in whom all the possible graces of character inhered. No one can read Sir Edwin Arnold's "Light of Asia" without feeling considerable sympathy with this decision. Where will you find an example of self-sacrifice, of consecration to the service of humanity equal to that of the Buddha? His sacrifice was greater than that of Jesus because Gotama was a prince, a member of the royal family, the heir to a throne, resident in a palace, lapped in luxury and provided with means for the satisfaction of all his earthly desires, yet he surrendered every privilege of his position, left his regal home and donned the garb of a monk to consecrate himself to the poorest and lowest in the land, and this, remember, in a country where caste counts for more than it does anywhere else, in a country where social distinctions were so developed that the highest are higher and the lowest lower than in any other section of the globe. Remember, too, that when he was ready to enter the Buddhist heaven, "Nirvana," Gotama preferred to remain outside that he might continue the great work of salvation to which he had dedicated his life.

Yet the salvation he preached, the "Nirvana" to which he led the way, cannot permanently satisfy a soul in love with progress. To be sure, after going through an almost endless process of rebirths to become fit at last for the bliss of Nirvana, one might welcome the goal as a glad haven of rest, but once rested and refreshed we should crave some new affirmation of the spirit, some further opportunity for service, some ampler expression of our spiritual possibilities, some new forward step toward the infinite ideal of life. The Buddha missed the great truth that life means growth, and this is the fundamental reason why we cannot follow him. Both his pessimistic conception of life and his statical heaven disqualify him for leadership.

III.

Will Moses serve as the ideal of humanity? My admiration and reverence for the great Hebrew liberator and legislator is sufficiently known to you to need no restatement or amplification now. To him has been ascribed the Decalogue. Granting that he is its author, that it represents his ethical and religious leadership, can we follow him? No more exclusively than we can follow the Buddha or Confucius. Awe-inspiring as are the ten commandments, they are almost wholly negative. Moses says "thou shalt not" steal, murder, covet, work on the Sabbath, commit idolatry, or adultery. But a man might fulfill every one of these negative injunctions and yet remain a relatively worthless individual, very good, of course, but good *for nothing;* harmless, to be sure, but not helpful; negatively righteous, not positively moral. And our need is for positive more than for negative ethics in the conduct of life. We need to know what to do fully as much as what not to do. But let it be remembered that all primitive leaders issued negative precepts, and that except for their prohibitions the task of civilizing humanity could not have been achieved. For primitive communities the ethics inculcated were precisely such as conformed to the requirements of the situation, and we may therefore be grateful as well as just in our estimate of the mission of Moses albeit that for our day his leadership is inadequate.

IV.

To mention Socrates is to call up one who possessed the so-called intellectual virtues to an exceptional degree—independent thinking, reliance on the power of reason, the passion for truth, fearless loyalty to unpopular convictions, serenity of spirit, trust in the laws of the universe. What a marvelous revelation of all these qualities there is afforded us in the "Apology": Who can read this dialogue of Plato and not feel moved and inspired to make the qualities of Socrates in some larger measure one's own? What a picture we have here of the incorruptible, unconquerable Socrates! He gave his life to education, to drawing out that which was in the minds of his hearers. Remembering his mother's profession, he described himself as an accoucheur at the birth of thoughts. To develop the thinking faculties of people, to help them discover truth for themselves, this, at Athens, was the public mission of the private citizen Socrates. To him the supremely important thing in life was the free development of the human mind, and like every other reformer with a great message he exaggerated its importance, going so far as to suggest that virtue is knowledge. But we know from experience that virtue is not knowledge. Train a child's intellect without converging that training on character and you are liable to create a dexterous, ingenious criminal rather than a worthy citizen of the state. Give a boy skill in penmanship unaccompanied by moral education and you run the risk of making a forger of checks and a candidate for the penitentiary. Cultivate the brain at the expense of the heart and conscience, and a dangerous member of society is likely to be the result. Now Socrates stood pre-eminently for the intellectual side of human culture, and because of this one-sidedness he cannot serve as the ideal of humanity.

V.

In strong and striking contrast to Socrates stands Jesus, representative par excellence of the *emotional* virtues—meekness, resignation, submission, humility, compassion, tenderness, pity, love. These are the emotional as contrasted with the intellectual virtues, and to Jesus they were of such paramount importance in

the formation of character that he went so far as to say that virtue is love, thus making the opposite mistake of Socrates. Train a child's heart in the sentiment of love without at the same time teaching it how to give it right expression, and what awful forms of evil and mischief may there not follow. Develop the spirit of benevolence without simultaneous attention to the proper guidance of that spirit, and the appalling facts learned at the charity bureau are multiplied indefinitely. No, virtue is not love any more than it is knowledge. It is both. Virtue is love guided by intelligence. The true moral culture is not as Jesus thought, a culture of the heart, nor again is it as Socrates thought, a culture of the brain; it is inclusive of both. But this is only another way of saying that Jesus, like Socrates, had the defects of his strong qualities. In his emphasis on the emotional virtue of self-abnegation Jesus was led to attach small value to the pursuit of knowledge as a worthy object in life, and to look on the physical and the aesthetic life as a hindrance rather than a help to the spiritual life. Nay, more, this very one-sidedness, this preponderance of the emotional over the intellectual and practical in the life and teaching of Jesus, was the very condition upon which he succeeded. That very defect made it possible for him to do his particular work. Like every other great genius, Jesus owed as much to his deficiencies as to his capabilities. But for his one-sidedness he would have failed in the great service he rendered the Roman empire at a time when the evidences of hopelessness and despair were everywhere in sight, when everything suggested decline, decay, death, when the need of the hour was a gospel of pity, sympathy, hope, faith and love. Had Jesus possessed the intellectual passion of Socrates, or the philosophical penetrationof Plato, or the scientific acumen of Newton, or the inventive genius of Edison, or the strategic gift of Napoleon, his great work in the world could not have been done. To a world burdened with the consciousness of hopelessness, the Stoic had brought his gospel of endurance and the Epicurean his doctrine of the pleasures of the hour that now is, but neither system brought what was needed. That came only when Jesus preached the coming kingdom of heaven, with the hope, enthusiasm and joyous peace therein in-

volved. His message proved to be precisely what was wanted, nor has the world ever seen anything nobler than the influence of that message as it was manifested in the lives of the early Christians. Jesus by uplifting the spiritual side at the expense of the intellectual, physical and aesthetic sides, manifested a narrowness which the world into which he came needed for its own regeneration. His exclusive emphasis on the emotional virtues, his one-sided attitude to the task of self-development, to the ideal end of human life, this was the condition that made possible the achievement of his reform. So then, while Jesus, because of these limitations, cannot serve as the ideal of humanity, we gratefully and reverently recognize and appreciate the fact that his very deficiencies were part of the secret of his success.

VI.

The conclusion, then, to which we are inevitably led is this: No one of the great historic leaders can serve as our leader, as the absolute realization of the ideal of humanity. There never was in any one soul a concentration of all the perfections possible to all persons, past, present and to be. Only in imagination, not in fact, has such a leader lived, though in India people think he was Gotama Buddha; in China, that he was Confucius; in Christendom, Jesus. One type of moral and spiritual excellence there was in the Buddha, another in Socrates, still another in Jesus, but the sum of moral and spiritual excellences was never embodied in any one of the great religious leaders of the world. As the entire beauty and excellence of the diamond does not shine from any one of its many facets, but is produced only from them altogether, so it takes all the great religious leaders and more to produce the beauty and excellence of the ideal of humanity.

Furthermore, the ideal of human life as it is conceived today was never entertained by any one of the world's religious leaders. It matters not to which one of them we turn, we find an ideal of life advocated that represents less than our modern conception. And what is this? In a word, self-realization, or the harmonious development of all the possibilities of our many-sided nature in a rounded life. Nowhere in the teachings of Jesus, or any other

great leader, do we find such a statement of life's ideal. It is a distinctly modern ideal. Whether we turn to ancient, mediæval or renaissance times, in each instance we note it was development of one or another side of our human nature, not the orderly development of all its sides, on which attention was fixed.

Inasmuch then as each of the great religious leaders of the past had his limitations, since each had the defects of his qualities, and none in himself either contained the totality of possible perfections or represented the ideal of self-realization as we understand it today, it follows that we can accept as our leader none, that we must be as non-sectarian on the question of religious leadership as we found we had to be on the question of leadership in social reform. The fact is that there can be no such thing as a fixed pattern for all men or for any one man for all time. Each man's personal ideal changes with his own growth, and his supreme piety must be loyalty to his own inherent ideal, other than which there can be none for him, simply because he is a different individual from every other. Let him take as his pattern Jesus, or Socrates, or the Buddha, and strive to reproduce in his own life any one of these individual ideals, and he not only achieves that mediocrity which all imitation produces, but what is worse, he falls short of that supreme duty and joy of self-religion which obedience to his own inner ideal alone makes possible. Be it the sacred task of each soul to develop the real, which is yourself as you are, into the ideal, which is yourself as you ought to be, and in consecrated devotion to this supreme duty draw all possible help from each of the historic religious leaders according to the amount of truth he taught, and the inspiration which the record of his life affords.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CREED SUBSCRIPTION.*

What is the true significance of creed subscription? What does it mean to be identified with a church, and what does it mean to be identified with no church? There may be listening to me this morning those who have never asked themselves this

*Extract from a discourse delivered in the First Free Church of Tacoma, Sunday, October 18th, 1903.

plain question, and who are subscribing to creeds without a clear knowledge of what their acts signify. As I have been such an one myself you, I trust, will not deem this suggestion invidious or in any way reflecting on your intelligence or moral integrity. There must be a beginning and now may be the accepted time to initiate the regenerative processes in our souls.

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And first of all what is a creed? In the simplest words, a creed is a statement in language of what is believed to be true. The statement may take various forms; it may be long or short; it may contain many propositions or it may contain only one; it may be declaratory or it may be interrogatory. And the language of a creed may be any one of those languages which man has used to communicate his thought to his kind. In the narrower sense, however, a creed is not a statement but a re-statement. If you look into any collection of creeds, such, for instance, as Philip Schaff's "Creeds of Christendom," you will find that each creed is and openly claims to be a reproduction of the ideas and beliefs already set forth in the canonical Christian scriptures. For originality in a creed is out of the question, and he who would be bold enough to evolve a creed out of his own inner consciousness would be forthwith written down as a dangerous heretic and a breeder of pestilence. At their very best creeds have never claimed to be original. The liberty of the creed has always been restricted to the narrow limits of scripture interpretation. And until very recently—the past few years in fact—an author on religion, who wished to be read at all, felt obliged to entitle his books "Old Faith in a New Light" or something similar, just as if faith itself could never be new. How pathetic a spectacle is that of a soul in bondage struggling to be free!

Nevertheless, in spite of this narrow way in which creeds have been usually taken, for my present purpose I wish to take the broader view. So let us agree that in the best possible sense a creed is a statement of what is believed to be true.

And this leads naturally to the next question, What is creed subscription? If a creed is a statement of what is believed to be true, what does it mean to subscribe to a creed? I fancy that

on first thought most of us would reply that he who subscribes to a creed in some mysterious way puts himself in the power of the creed. And the fear of this creedal grip has done more perhaps than anything else to embitter many good men and women against religions and all institutions devoted to spiritual inspirations. And historically this fear is well grounded. Creeds have held millions in their power—literally held them, on the rack and over flaming fires and under the guillotine. Like taloned beasts of prey they have swooped down upon innocent children and defenceless women, dragging them into hideous dungeons to starve and to swoon and to die. And in so far as this cruel heartless spirit continues to animate the defenders of religious faith the world is right in turning its back on everything that savors of a creed or doctrine. But in a republic like ours where the church has been separated from the state and where religion is deprived of the power of physical coercion the death-grip of the creed has been broken. And it would be inacurate in us now to speak of being literally held by any creed or dogma. Still we must not forget that there are other methods of coercion. Some of us esteem business prosperity, friendship, and social standing even more highly than a sound body. And the individual or institution that can deprive us of these holds us in its power even more literally than did the agents of Torquemada hold their helpless victims.

But still in the light of all these generally admitted facts so damaging to the reputation of religious dogma, I must say that there *is* a fear even more dreadful than the fear of being held *by* a creed. And this is the fear of *holding* a creed. Compared with this latter fear, the fear of being held by a creed is quite superficial. And in reading over the utterances of my critics I have been very much surprised to learn that this aspect of creed subscription has been entirely overlooked. To a man they have neglected what seems to me to be the core of the whole difficulty. Let me explain to you just what I mean.

The man who holds a creed, no matter how loosely he may grasp it, places his influence at the disposal of the creed he holds. And if there is anything about which we should be careful that

thing is our influence. For after all it is influence that tells. So that the main question in creed subscription is really this: Are we willing to lend our influence to that which the creed affirms to be true? If we are, then it is our duty to subscribe to that creed. As I have written elsewhere, a creed is nothing more or less than a pledge. And there should be no prejudices against pledges as such. For he who takes a pledge takes a stand, and he who takes a truthful pledge takes a stand for truth.

But this is the very point which all my critics have either ignored or overlooked. They seem to be concerned exclusively with the creed as binding them. But to my mind this aspect of creed subscription is of minor importance. In the battle for truth one question and one question alone must be asked and answered, On what side will we cast our influence? And if the creed proposed for our subscription states what we believe to be true, by all means we should subscribe to that creed, willing to be bound literally if need be; yes, willing to die for the sake of the truth.

I have said nothing thus far that may not apply to every one who by any chance finds himself in any way identified with any church. The fundamental principle of creed subscription is the same in all communions. In every creed the vital question is the question of influence. But in closing I must say one word which has a special application to a group of religious believers known as the Unitarians, for this is made necessary by the fact that so many of my critics are clergymen of Unitarian churches.

As many of you know the Unitarian churches claim to be free and independent, and they would resent even the suspicion that they were in any way bound by a creed. And in the organic law of the denomination it is distinctly stated that they are not bound to their own creed. This being the case, much more ought to be expected from the Unitarian churches than from the churches that *are* bound by their creeds. The greater the freedom the greater the obligations and responsibilities. The man who is free to do right is quite inexcusable if he does not do right; and we may overlook many faults in a slave, but the faults of a freeman are difficult to pardon. If perchance, then, a Uniatrian

be found lending his influence to creeds and institutions in which he does not believe his sin is a grave one, a sin committed against the Holy Spirit—the sin for which there is no pardon and which, we read, will not be forgiven. And let it be said right here that this Tacoma church has used its freedom with a proper sense of the responsibilities which goes with that precious privilege. As soon as you became convinced that the beliefs to which you had been giving your allegiance were false you withdrew from them your influence. And I must add that all other Unitarian churches are in duty bound to follow your example as soon as they reach the same conviction.

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TACOMA.*

BY F. L. HOSMER.

For days I watched thro' the mist-laden air
  To see full-outlined on the azure sky
  Tacoma in his snow-crowned majesty.
Yet knew I that the mountain towered there
Though veiled from sight. Then on a morning rare
  The white clouds lifted, and before my eye
  Uprose the mount in lone sublimity,
Far-shining, vast, of dateless time the heir.
So thro' the mists that dim our earthly ways,
  The frequent questionings and doubts that rise,
    We wait full vision where we hope and long:
But in the soul there dawn these signal days,
  The heights stand forth, all fair the landscape lies,
    And on we walk with gladdened heart and strong.

*Reprinted from *The Pacific Unitarian,* by kind permission of the editor, Mr. C. A. Murdock.

OUR CAUSE IN MASSACHUSETTS.

Massachusetts is a state which has a fine history. She has been foremost in all good works and her impress has been indelibly stamped on almost every American institution. She has been the promoter of progress in statesmanship, education, and religion and to the needs of humanity she has seldom turned a deaf ear. Her hospitality to new ideas has been so marked as to win for her capitol city the enviable title, "the city of fads." Boston has been the center of culture and philosophy and on account of her deep interest in the higher humanities she has been called the "Athens of America." It is with great pleasure, then, that we announce to our readers that Massachusetts has just sent us twenty-five new names to be added to the list of subscribers to our monthly organ. The cause of free and independent churches is a worthy cause embodying religious ideals that shall be in harmony with the political ideals of our American republic. An imperialistic religion in the midst cf democratic institutions is, to say the least, an anachronism if not a contradiction. So we rejoice that now, as in the foretime, the commonwealth of Massachusetts begins to speak out for the freedom of the human soul. We hope that these twenty-five new subscribers from the old Bay State will serve as an example *pour encourager les autres,* and that many other states will be influenced to send us an equal number of new subscribers for the year 1904.

We have just received a letter from Ayer, Massachusetts, stating that there are a number of free church sympathizers in that village who hold stated meetings for the discussion of the principles of our cause. We are greatly encouraged by these signs of the slow but sure growth of religious emancipation. It may appear on the surface that the founding of two free churches in ten years is a poor record, but it should be borne in mind that Jesus, the founder of Christianity, had been dead several years before a *single* Christian church was founded. We trust that our Ayer friends will persevere in the course entered upon, keeping ever before their minds the teaching of evolutionary history that

large ends have small beginnings. If any of our readers should chance to have free church literature with which they are willing to part, they will assist our cause by mailing it to Mrs. N. F. Kittridge, Ayer, Mass.—R.

THE LATE MR. E. W. MEDDAUGH.

Word has just reached us as we go to press of the death of Mr. E. W. Meddaugh, of Detroit, Mich., an occasional contributor to the pages of this monthly and a generous subscriber to its treasury, an honorary trustee of the First Free Church of Tacoma and one of the most devoted of its non-resident members. Again and again during the past ten years did Mr. Meddaugh manifest the sincerity and practicality of his sympathy with the movement in Tacoma by his helpful counsel in matters of administration and by his liberal contributions on every occasion when extra funds were needed to develop the work in hand. Mr. Meddaugh's attainments in the field of ethics and scientific theology were no less exceptional than his abilities as an attorney, these having received appreciative recognition by his appointment, many years ago, as counsel for the Chicago & Grand Trunk Railway, a position which he held to the time of his death.

FIELD NOTES.

SEATTLE.

Mr. Martin began his duties as resident minister of the Society for Universal Religion on the third Sunday of September. Since then the work has been developing in different directions, notably by the formation of a "Junior branch" of the Society, officered by an executive committee of seven. This organization started with fourteen members November 8th, and now (December 27th) has an enrollment of fifty-four. The five objects of the Junior branch are as follows:

To study the lives of great human examples in the conduct of life. To read and memorize moral precepts of the world's great teachers. To develop in our minds the spirit of unbiased truth-seeking. To develop in our hearts the spirit of sympathy,

loyalty and unselfish service. To fit ourselves for intelligent and useful membership in the Adults' Society for Universal Religion. All boys and girls, under eighteen years of age and not connected with any other religious organization, or Sunday school, are eligible for membership.

TACOMA.

The removal of Mr. Martin from Tacoma to Seattle on the 1st of October last, brought the First Free Church of Tacoma face to face with the greatest crisis in its history. There could be no doubt as to the success of the Free Church so long as Mr. Martin remained its minister. But in the event of his removal, which everyone knew must come sooner or later, thoughtful men and women wondered what would become of the Tacoma Free Church. The opportunity to practically test the question came sooner than was expected, but the officers and members of the Free Church proved themselves equal to the trying emergency. For no sooner did Mr. Martin announce his decision to remove to Seattle than the trustees held a meeting and decided to look for a successor. A six-months' call was extended to Mr. J. W. Roberts, of Massachusetts, who accepted the invitation and was on the ground to take up the work the first Sunday of October.

On the first Sunday in November there was organized under the direction of Mr. Roberts an adult class in the Sunday school. The membership of this class is now twenty-one, and it is confidently expected that many more will join with the beginning of the new year. The subject of the year's study is the "Rational Basis of Religion," and the text-book used is "Faith Built on Reason," by Fanny L. Abbot.

Beginning in January, Mr. Roberts will give a series of talks on parliamentary law to the Woman's Union. Each talk will be illustrated by the actual practice of the rules explained.

The course on "Evolution," which was to be given to the Young Ladies' Alliance by Mrs. Martin, will be given by Mr. Roberts, owing to the rapid growth of Mrs. Martin's duties in the Seattle Society.